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# The Faroe Islands: Independence dreams, globalist separatism and the Europeanization of postcolonial home rule

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**Rebecca Adler-Nissen**

## Abstract

This article examines the intersection of postimperial sovereignty and European integration in the context of a disintegrating Nordic empire. More specifically, it explores the relationships between the Faroe Islands – a group of self-governing islands in the North Atlantic – Denmark and the rest of the world. While the Faroe Islands have gained increased autonomy from Denmark, Faroese separatists are now discussing whether to transfer their newly won autonomy further on to the EU. This contradictory development of separation and integration is shaped by interweaving ideas of sovereignty, nationalism, globalization and postcolonial dependency. The article shows that the Faroese–Danish relationship is being internationalized and Europeanized as the EU and UN become reference points in negotiations of political visions for an independent Faroese state and the controversial issue of pilot whaling. Notwithstanding dramatic transformations, the Faroese–Danish relationship has maintained its postcolonial character, where Denmark is awkwardly constituted as a maternalistic colonial power defending an adolescent colonized from the rest of the world. The real novelty is not the increased Faroese autonomy from Denmark, but how the EU challenges the unity of the postimperial Danish realm and hence the myth of a homogenous Danish nation-state.

## Keywords

Denmark, empire, European Union, Faroe Islands, postcolonialism, sovereignty

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## Introduction

The Faroe Islands, a Danish possession consisting of a group of self-governing North Atlantic islands where the sheep (70,000) outnumber the people (49,000), offers a fascinating illustration of the role of the EU in postcolonial relations. Moreover, it shows the importance of international organizations for how disintegrating empires relate to their dependencies. Having been forced to grant Norway independence in 1814 and having sold the Virgin Islands colonies to the United States in 1917, Denmark was left with three overseas outposts: Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Iceland became independent in 1944 and after the Second World War, the Faroe Islands became self-governing with the Home Rule Act (1948). The Faroe Islands and Greenland are different in many respects, including in terms of race. The population on the Faroe Islands are of Danish-Norwegian decent with no known indigenous population prior to the settlement of the islands, whereas Greenland was populated by Inuit before Danish colonization. Focusing on the Faroe Islands, this article shows how Denmark's imperial legacy, despite being conspicuously absent from Danish political debates, is important not only for the Danish realm (*Rigsfællesskabet*), but also for the Nordic region and wider dynamics between *Norden*, Europe and the rest of the world.

For decades, the Faroese independence movement has objected to Denmark's authority over the islands. The movement has its roots in the 1880s as a romantic nationalist awakening, but while early nationalists focused on promoting a Faroese identity within the Danish realm, the fight for independence is a more recent phenomenon. Today, the independence movement and the majority of the Faroese population (pro-independence or not) is globalist in orientation, but it is also attached to traditional lifestyles involving birding and pilot whale hunting, the latter of which attracts widespread international and European criticism. Today, a crucial element in Danish postcolonialism is awkwardness, which is evident in the ways in which Denmark handles international criticism of Faroese fishing and hunting. Seeking to constitute itself as a progressive former colonizer, Denmark balances two global discourses: defending the 'original cultural habits' of former colonies while at the same time protecting animal welfare and being eco-friendly.

Denmark has already handed over substantial autonomy to the Faroese parliament in Tórshavn, but support for an independent Faroese state has become widespread; past years consistently show about 50% Faroese are in favour of independence from Denmark (Rigsombudsmanden på Færøerne, 2011: 2). Some Faroese politicians are discussing whether to transfer their newly won autonomy further on to the EU and other international organizations, while others argue for a pro-globalist but EU-sceptic separatism. In 1973, when Denmark joined the European Community (EC), the Faroe Islands remained outside the EC to protect its political autonomy and the Faroese fishing waters from other EC members. Over time, Norway and Iceland, states sharing a common imperial past with the Faroe Islands as part of the Danish multinational conglomerate state, strengthened their relationships with the EU by joining the EFTA and EEA. In contrast, the Faroe Islands – as one of only a few territories in Western Europe – still figures as a 'third country' in relation to the EU. Nonetheless, the EU plays an important role for the Faroe Islands both as an export market and as a reference for a political future outside the Danish realm. In 1998, the Faroese government established its own diplomatic

representation in Brussels in cooperation with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, the Faroese parliament set up the Faroese Treaty Commission, which drafted a constitution for a sovereign Faroe Island state in a 'free association' with Denmark. It also established an economic council, which argued that using the EU's common currency, the euro, rather than the Danish kroner could be advantageous for the Faroese economy (Landsstyret, 1999: 183). The Faroese government has also negotiated an association with the EU's research programme (FP7 Framework Programme, now 2020 Horizon) and is aiming to be part of the European Common Aviation Area. Generally, Faroese government are considering how to cooperate more closely with the EU without necessarily becoming part of the Union. These apparently contradictory developments of separatism from Denmark and integration into the EU are shaped by dreams of independence, although full Faroese sovereignty is not expected in the foreseeable future.

Scholars exploring how European integration impacts on separatism (e.g. Keating, 2004) have hitherto avoided the Nordic member states. For instance, a recent study of regionalism and Europeanization in the Nordic states concludes that there is only a pragmatic, economically driven regionalism in the Nordic region. As authors argue, 'Denmark, Norway and Sweden are more homogenous than Italy and Spain for instance when looking at language, the common welfare state model etc.' (Dosenrode and Halkier, 2004: 201). In fact, the scholars find no linkages between European integration and separatism in the north (contrary to other regions in Europe) because, as they claim, '[f]or the Nordic regions, the all-important frame of reference... remains the nation-state' (Dosenrode and Halkier, 2004: 202). In other words, scholars, reflecting a general collective amnesia (see Andersen, 2013 for an argument that colonialism is not forgotten, but refigured), overlook the postimperial relations in the Nordic countries that are deeply influenced by global and European developments.

This article shows how the Danish–Faroese relationship is being internationalized and Europeanized. The bond between Denmark, the former colonizer, and the Faroes, the former colony, is changing, due in part to European integration. This can be demonstrated by focusing on *sovereignty games*, i.e. strategic claims in relation to authority and responsibility referring to sovereignty (Adler-Nissen and Gad, 2014; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Adler-Nissen, 2008). Sovereignty games play out in discourses, institutions and practices and, while referring to ideas about absolute authority over territory, they end up stretching the meaning and functions of sovereignty.

The first part of the article explores the bilateral postcolonial sovereignty games in the evolution of the Danish–Faroese relationship. It analyses the shift from settler colony to self-government from the 1880s to the current time and ends with the negotiations of economic responsibility and dependency and the so-called Great Bank Affair in the early 1990s. The second part of the article looks at multilateral dynamics, i.e. the intersection between postcolonial relations and late-sovereign games. It analyses attempts by Faroese leaders to appeal to the UN and thereby internationalize the question of Faroese statehood and status as an independent nation, and subsequently examines the more recent and open-ended Europeanization, understood as an incremental process partly re-orienting the Faroese–Danish postcolonial relationship. The final section builds on my own participant observation in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and zooms in on the meeting in practice between postcolonial and European logics of distributing

subjectivity in relation to the controversial practice of pilot whaling. Notwithstanding a series of dramatic political, economic and social changes, the Faroese–Danish relationship has maintained its postcolonial character. The article concludes that the real novelty when it comes to the Faroese position in the world is less increased autonomy from Denmark and more the EU's role in challenging the unity of the Danish realm.

## The Home Rule Act: continuous sovereignty games

In 1998, separatist-oriented parties gained a majority in the Faroese parliament (*Løgtingið*) and began negotiating terms of independence with the Danish government. The negotiations (to which I will return) ended in a deadlock, but the question of a sovereign Faroe Islands continues to crop up on the Faroese agenda. Political independence, however, has not always been the ultimate goal of the Faroese national movement. To understand the features of the current separatist movement, this section briefly revisits the history of Faroese nationalism and the road to the Home Rule Act (1948), one of the most advanced self-governing arrangements existing for overseas regions today (Aldrich and Connell, 1998: 46).

The first inhabitants of the Faroe Islands arrived around the year 400 AD. A couple of centuries later, around the year 900, Norse settlers took possession of the country. From around 1135, the Faroe Islands were brought under the auspices of the Norwegian crown as a tributary country, and they became subject to the Norwegian Parliament Act in 1271. A legislative assembly, the *Løgtingið*, replaced the Faroese *Alting* and mainly functioned as a court of law. Along with Norway, the Faroe Islands came under Danish rule in 1380. Danish absolutism, which was formally introduced in 1662, forced the *Løgtingið* to pledge allegiance to the Danish monarch. Denmark, which was seen as the very epitome of absolutism in European political debate became centralized and the North Atlantic dependencies were administered directly from Copenhagen. Danish sheriffs controlled the territory and demanded taxes. Denmark slowly began to tie territory, authority and economy together, and trade became a royal monopoly in 1709. This state of affairs lasted until 1856. The Faroe Islands remained Danish after the Treaty of Kiel transferred Norway from the Danish to the Swedish crown in 1814 (Østergaard, 1992). Two years later, the *Løgtingið* was abolished, having already lost its political importance. The same year, the Faroe Islands received status as a Danish county, but only got its own prefect in 1816.

When democracy was introduced, it was assumed by Danish officials that the Danish Constitution of 1849 also applied to the Faroes, which were allowed to send representatives to the Danish parliament. Following the military and political defeat of 1864, when Denmark lost much of its southern territory to Germany, Denmark shrunk from a multinational state to a small and homogenous nation-state – *almost*, because Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland remained part of the composite state of Denmark (Østergaard, 1992: 2).

A Faroese nationalist movement emerged as part of a larger European wave of national awakening in the 1880s. In this period, Faroese nationalism was oriented towards culture, looking to revive (or reinvent) Faroese language and native literature (Cold-Ravnkilde, 2004; Østergaard, 2008). The Faroese sailor and poet Nólsoyar-Páll (1766–1808) became a central mythical figure and is still seen as a national hero. Nólsoyar-Páll was inspired by revolutionary ideas in France and America, as well as the

Danish national poet N.F.S. Grundtvig and the Danish folk high school movement (see Hansen (2001) for a description of Grundtvig's role in Danish nationalism). Nólsoyar-Páll agitated against the Danish trade monopoly. His satirical song *Fuglakvædid* ('the bird song') described Danish officials as birds of prey, the poor Faroese people as small birds and himself as a cunning magpie.<sup>2</sup>

As elsewhere in Europe, the young educated elites were the most active nationalists. Faroese students in Copenhagen formed a patriotic club in 1881. Soon, articles about the Faroese language were appearing in *Dimmalætting*, the Faroese newspaper. In 1888, *Foringafelag* was founded – a national association whose main aim was to teach and spread the written Faroese language. Faroese nationalism mirrored Danish political movements. For example, the Faroese political parties were formed after the Danish party model, and Danish national newspapers influenced the Faroese newspapers (Møller, 1958). In 1919, three students created the Faroese flag, inspired by the Nordic ones. – a red and blue cross on a white background. It came into use in the Faroes 21 years later, when Germany occupied metropolitan Denmark in 1940.

However, internal conflicts appeared in the nationalist movement very early. Many Faroese felt that their country was not ready for independence. Ever since the first wave of nationalism in the 1880s, the Faroese political scene has been structured around the question of how to relate to Denmark. During the 1890s, the Faroese nationalist movement split into a conservative group and a self-rule group. The conservative group sought support from the Danish government and officials, while the self-rule were seen as the champions of increased Faroese autonomy. Even today, the Faroese political system remains based on a double axis of conflict: on the one hand, the classic left–right axis; on the other the separatist–union axis relating to sovereignty (see also Figure 2 in Adler-Nissen and Gad, 2014).<sup>3</sup> Currently, the Faroe Islands have six political parties represented in the Faroese parliament: the Unionist Party, *Sambandsflokkurin*; the Self-Rule Party, *Sjálvstýrisflokkurin*; the Social Democratic Party, *Javnaðarflokkurin*; the Conservative Party, *Fólkaflokkurin*; the Republican Party, *Tjóðveldisflokkurin*; and the Centre Party, *Miðflokkurin*.

The Second World War promoted the dissolution of the Danish empire. In 1944, Iceland withdrew completely from the union with Denmark, despite Danish reluctance (Knudsen, 2000: 921–924; see also Bergmann, 2014). Iceland's independence inspired Faroese politicians, suggesting a domino effect from Iceland to the remaining parts of the multinational Kingdom of Denmark (Knudsen, 2000: 905). In 1940, the UK established a protectorate in the Faroe Islands, following the German occupation of metropolitan Denmark. During the war, Faroese fishermen made their fortune exporting fish to England. Many Faroese came to feel that they could do without Danish support. Inspired by Iceland, a referendum on Faroese independence was held on 14 September 1946 (Møller, 1958: 69).<sup>4</sup> It resulted in a modest majority in favour of secession, and independence was proclaimed. Taken by surprise by the result, however, the Danish government dissolved the Faroese parliament and a general election was called, which was won by the pro-union parties (Steining, 1953: 185). After a couple of years of negotiations between Danish and Faroese authorities, a compromise agreement was reached in 1948: the Home Rule Act. This Act greatly increased the power of the local Faroe government. For the first time, Denmark accepted Faroese as the main language, and Faroese influence grew when it gained a second seat in the Danish parliament five years later. As will



be demonstrated, the Act is a flexible constitutional arrangement allowing for sovereignty games, creating 'a self-governing community within the Kingdom of Denmark' (Act no. 137 of 23 March 1948, section 1).

The Home Rule Act divides fields of responsibility into matters of common interest, handled by Denmark, and matters of local interest, handled by the Faroese Home Rule authorities, the *Løgtingið* (parliament) and the *Landsstýri* (government). Today, principal matters of common interest are foreign policy and defence, police, education, administration of justice, banking, currency and churches. Gradually, more and more fields of responsibility have been taken over by Faroese authorities. This is possible because the Home Rule Act is based on the fluid term 'negotiations'. Section 9 reads:

After negotiations it shall be decided in which cases and to what extent it is possible, within fields of common interests, to leave to the Faroese Home Government the detailed regulations for special Faroese affairs and the administration of the fields in question.

As should be apparent, the Home Rule Act accepts continuous dialogue on sovereignty. A treaty based on negotiations is not uncommon; EU treaties also allow for the Union to be a moving target, driven by permanent negotiations (Adler-Nissen, 2011: 1092–1113; Farrell and Héritier, 2003). The Home Rule Act allows for continuous changes to the division of competences between the Danish state and Faroese government, leading to what could be called an 'ever looser union' (see also Gad, 2008: 111–133).

The end of the Cold War raised the question of the international position of the Faroe Islands. During the Cold War, Denmark was under pressure from both the Soviet authorities and the US Government to reject an independent state in the North Atlantic, as this would pose an excessive security risk for both sides (Jensen, 2004). The Danish government tried to find a delicate balance between its different obligations to NATO, the US, Copenhagen as capital of the Danish realm and Faroese authorities (Jensen, 2004). In 1997, the Faroese Home Rule Government ordered an independent examination of the Faroe Islands during the Cold War (Johansen, 1999). It showed that Denmark had benefited from its sovereignty over the Faroese territory. Thanks to the NATO bases on Greenland and the Faroe Islands, Denmark received a discount on its NATO membership fee, using 2.6% of GNP instead of the usual 3% on its military. The American crew on the Faroese radar station had been accepted by Denmark, although without fully informing Faroese authorities. According to Faroese nationalists, Denmark saved money by making the Faroe Islands a target for an atomic bomb.

After the Cold War, the wish to articulate a more independent Faroese subjectivity led to a supplementary self-government arrangement, which was introduced in 2005. The Foreign Policy Powers Act (or the Take Over Act) expands the possibilities for the Faroese public authorities to decide to take over new fields of affairs. The Foreign Policy Powers Act provides the Faroe Islands with more room for manoeuvre in the international arena. The Act gives the Faroe Islands the right to conclude agreements (in the name of the Kingdom of Denmark) with other countries and organizations relating entirely to subject matters under the jurisdiction of the Faroes' authorities, such as fisheries. This means that Faroese representatives sit alongside Danish diplomats when they negotiate treaties of relevance to the Islands (Grahl-Madsen, 1986: 7).



However, there are limits to this room for manoeuvre. The Faroe Islands cannot conclude international agreements on defence and security policies. Moreover, the Foreign Policy Powers Act does not allow the Faroe Islands to enter into international agreements which apply to Denmark, nor to negotiate membership of international organizations of which Denmark is already a member (Report to Faroese Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2010: 26).

Consequently, the Faroese dream of WTO membership and observer status in the UN General Assembly is automatically rejected by the Danish authorities with reference to the Foreign Policy Powers Act. This is not considered compatible with the constitutional status of the Faroe Islands. As demonstrated in the section on the European dimension of the Faroese independence struggle, the Danish authorities' interpretation of this act and the EU's interpretation of its own treaties imply that the opportunities available to the Faroe Islands to develop a closer relationship with the EU are also limited (see also Olafsson, 1982).

### **'The Great Bank Affair' and postcolonial responsibility**

The Faroese–Danish relationship is in many ways postcolonial. Nowhere is this as striking as in the debate on economic relations. The Faroe Islands rely on financial support from Denmark, although block grants have diminished dramatically over the past years. A major obstacle to Faroese independence is the Faroese economy, which depends heavily on fisheries. Fish products constitute about 95% of the total export value (Rigsombudsmanden på Færøerne, 2013: 40). The Danish block grants of approximately €80 million per year are at the centre of all negotiations concerning secession. Following the Faroese government's takeover of areas such as public schools and public assistance, the grants represent about 17–19% of the Faroese public budget (Rigsombudsmanden på Færøerne, 2013: 130).

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the rapidly growing grants from Denmark were used on various projects to modernize Faroese society. Consequently, the Faroese standard of living was superior to that on the Danish mainland for a number of years. At the beginning of the 1990s, however, the Faroe Islands experienced a pronounced decline in fishing stock, as well as a fall in EU fish prices. The monoculture economy based on a single product revealed its vulnerability (Schmid, 1993: 171). The Faroe Islands underwent a deep economic crisis, remedied somewhat by aid from the Danish government. During the crisis, unemployment rose to 25%, and over 10% of the population emigrated to Denmark (Skaale, 1997: 65).

In March 1993, Denmark's largest bank, Danske Bank, sold a controlling stake in the Faroese Føroya Banki to the Faroese government after Danske Bank covered losses in Føroya Banki. A few months later, however, Føroya Bank required a capital injection of EUR 160 million, and the Danish government provided a loan of EUR 201 million. Altogether, the Faroese government borrowed €804 million from the Danish state to cover the costs of the 1990s economic crisis. The Faroese government claimed that the Danish government and Danske Bank had inflicted a loss of several million EUR on Faroese society because Danske Bank had left responsibility for its subsidiary bank, Føroya Banki, to the Faroese government. A subsequent report commissioned by the Danish parliament criticized both Danske Bank and the Danish government, finding that they had been fully informed about the catastrophic economic developments.

Following what became known as the ‘Great Bank Affair’, Home Rule was *de facto* suspended as far as financial policy was concerned. Denmark requested that the Faroese *Løgmand* sign IMF agreements, and a new economic policy was enforced in relation to fisheries, business and taxation. The Danish government justified its harsh policy under the heading ‘We lend the money, the IMF makes the rules’ (Skaale, 1997: 61). The affair exposed Denmark’s selective approach to Faroese autonomy. During the economic crisis, the Danish government declared the Faroe Islands to be responsible for their own economic problems. As demonstrated below, however, when the UN Human Rights Committee later called for recognition of the Faroe Islands as a nation, the Danish government argued that the Faroe Islands were part and parcel of the Danish nation.

Few political parties in Denmark support the postcolonial ‘victim argument’ promoted by some Faroese republicans. Strikingly, even if Denmark agreed to a 12-year adjustment of the block grants following Faroese independence, Denmark would only gain financially from a self-supporting Faroese community. As then-Deputy Prime Minister Høgni Hoydal provocatively noted, ‘the Danish government is even prepared to pay DKK 1.3 billion each year to avoid independence’ (Hoydal, 2000b). Denmark’s inclination to keep the Faroes as part of the realm – and to pay for it, too – is part of the Danish imperial legacy linked to a particular understanding of responsibility for the former colonies (Gad, 2008; Jensen, 2012).

According to Robert R. Jackson (1990), if states are unable to support themselves without aid from international society, they must either suffer the consequences or admit that they are not ready to hold the rights and responsibilities of sovereignty. This position favours a world order in which, besides sovereignty, there are other statuses available, such as colonies, protectorates and mandates (Inayatullah, 1996: 71). As Inayatullah notes, however, the idea of meriting sovereignty is peculiar. Independence has a *meaning* to the populations of former colonies. Even though a maternalistic supervision and control of a postcolonial society might improve material living standards, independence has a value of its own: it means being recognized as an equal among equals (Inayatullah, 1996: 73). To Faroese separatists, the Bank Affair underlined the necessity to be economically as well as financially independent.

## Independence and the international recognition of the Faroese nation

Following the bank crisis, many Faroese felt more hostile towards Denmark, and the independence movements gained a victory in the Faroese parliament in 1998: a political process with the declared aim of achieving full sovereignty was initiated. In terms of sovereignty games, it involved the internationalization of the separatist struggle with reference to UN ideas of self-determination.

In 1999, a constitutional committee was appointed to draft an independence treaty. The committee arranged for several international scholars to evaluate the possibility of Faroese independence.<sup>5</sup> By 2000, the *Landsstýri* had drafted a treaty establishing a sovereign Faroese state in a ‘free association’ with Denmark. The proposal was inspired by the Icelandic personal union with Denmark from 1918, which proved that there was precedence for such a status within the Danish Realm. Moreover, the concept of

free association was inspired by a 1960 UN General Assembly resolution related to the de-colonization process. There are two key elements in a free association. The first is the right 'to determine its internal constitution without outside interference'.<sup>6</sup> This right is central to Faroese separatists, who argue that the Home Rule Act is based on a delegation of powers to the Home Rule government which can be unilaterally withdrawn by the Danish state – i.e. it is colonial in its very nature. The second requirement is that the associated territory has the unilateral right to modify its status, i.e. to opt for independence.

Moreover, whereas associated states cannot be members of the UN, a free association would enable the Faroese authorities to engage independently in international cooperation. For instance, the Faroe Islands could conclude treaties with other states and international organizations, which, to the disappointment of the independence movement, had previously been impossible.<sup>7</sup>

To back its claim for independence, the Faroese government actively engaged the international community. The UN Human Rights Committee criticized Denmark for not addressing the question of 'the implementation of the right of self-determination for the population of the Faroes' (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 2000: 2). Notwithstanding UN support, international interest was limited. When a Faroese official asked the UN to participate as a third party at the negotiations, the UN answered that, according to the UN Charter, this could 'be done only at the request of a Member State' (Corell, 2000).

Interestingly, the same arguments are heard from the EU. While interested in a closer relationship with the Faroe Islands, there are limits to how far the EU will go. The European Commission representative responsible for relations with Western Europe outside the EU explains: 'Well, it's easy. The Faroe Islands are not a state. This is up to Denmark to decide'.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, formal statehood makes a crucial difference to what one can and cannot do in international politics. While Denmark has not surrendered its ultimate authority over the Faroe Islands, the principle of self-determination has provided moral and legal arguments to the Faroese independence movement and forced Denmark to make a number of substantial commitments, including block grants and increased political autonomy. The negotiations over independence illustrate the effective use of postcolonial sovereignty games: by threatening to claim independence, one can obtain something else; not necessarily sovereignty, but both political and economic gains.

A referendum on independence should have been held on 26 May 2001 but was cancelled due to disagreements between the Faroese negotiators and the Danish government (Akrén, 2006: 227). The negotiations with the Danish government revealed three main obstacles to Faroese independence. First was the length of the period during which Denmark should continue paying subventions to the secessionist islands. According to Danish Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, full independence would mean full economic responsibility and the withdrawal of current subsidies within a maximum of three to four years. Furthermore, the Danish PM stated that the islands would be expected to start paying immediately for any health, educational, juridical and military support received. This was too hardline for the Faroese delegation, which had proposed a 12-year period for phasing out subsidies. Second, the Danish government refused to recognize the Faroe Islands as a separate nation. Denmark insisted that the Faroe people

were a 'community' within the Danish nation, not a 'nation' unto themselves.<sup>9</sup> The Faroese coalition's proposal of 'a federal treaty based on international law' was difficult to accept for Danish politicians.<sup>10</sup> It would 'reveal' the heterogeneity of the Danish state. In Danish political discourse, the boundaries of the nation, the state and the people must correlate. Even though 'the rhetoric of "one people, one state" echoes in the speeches of every dissatisfied minority', the 'so-called ethnic principle of self-determination has never been seriously considered by the international community to be the sole, or even primary, factor in assessing claims to statehood' (Hannum, 1995: 7). Third, the Danish PM's determined approach drew condemnation from the Faroese delegation, who felt humiliated. Then-Danish Minister of Finance Mogens Lykketoft described the Faroese people as 'irresponsible' and 'spoiled' and supported the PM's hard line, along with the mainstream Danish media (Hoydal, 2000a: 76). The Faroese media saw the deadlock in the negotiations as an expression of Danish colonial pride and Faroese marginality.

## **A European way out of postcoloniality?**

While the negotiations with Denmark on independence ended in deadlock in 2001, the nationalist movement lives on, albeit in a shattered version. This section examines the partial Europeanization of the independence dreams in the Faroe Islands. With Europeanization, I do not refer to a legal understanding, i.e. 'a process where states adopt EU rules' (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005: 7); instead, to capture the EU's role in political debates, I understand it as an 'incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making' (Ladrech, 1994: 69). This section first examines the political debates on the relationship with the EU, and in particular the role of fisheries. The more bureaucratic, yet deeply political, issues detailed in a report on the Faroe Islands and the EU requested by the Faroese government in 2010 are examined thereafter.

### *Globalist separatism*

Just as the first nationalist movements in the Faroe Islands were stimulated from the outside, the modern separatist discourse in the Faroe Islands is inspired by global ideas. The nationalism that emerged in the 1880s has maintained many of its original features, references to wildlife and a romantic relation to nature, but in addition, the dominant separatist arguments in the Faroe Islands now draw on a globalization discourse. Indeed, the republican separatists are explicitly pro-globalization in their approach to Faroese nationalism. They promote a vision of democratic self-determination in a world characterized by interdependence. Høgni Hoydal, the charismatic Republican Party leader, intellectual and former Faroese representative in the Danish parliament, argues:

The trend of our day is globalisation. National boundaries are fading and losing significance. Trade and communication barriers are dissolving. The world is opening up. People are not isolated within their own borders.<sup>11</sup>

Hoydal criticizes what he calls the ‘schizophrenia’ of the Faroese population, split between a Faroese island culture based on natural resources and the Danish-promoted welfare society. Only as a sovereign nation can the Faroese affirm their identity (Hoydal, 2000a: 10). Accordingly, the ultimate aim of Faroese independence is not isolation, but participation in globalization independently of Denmark – that is, just as in Greenland, the idea is to *diversify* the relations to the outside world (Gad, 2009: 136–158). Hoydal claims:

Sovereignty is the best way to ensure that the people who live here have control over their own affairs and their own society. We believe it is the best way to meet the challenges of globalization. The purpose of Faroese sovereignty, then, is to take the future into our own hands; and in doing so, to assume a responsible role in the world.<sup>12</sup>

This articulation of Faroese nationality is based on the premise that the erosion of territorial borders and economic barriers is not a problem for the cultural identity of the Faroese people. In other words, sovereignty is not articulated as a choice between dependency and freedom, but rather the exchange of one type of dependency (a postcolonial situation) for another (globalization). This articulation is – in principle – open for Faroese engagement in international organizations such as the EU. However, the Republican Party combines the most pro-globalist voice on the Faroe Islands with staunch EU-scepticism. Høydal frames the Faroese independence project as part of a larger process, a search for ‘collective solidarities on a smaller scale’ in a globalizing world (Scholte, 1996: 581). More specifically, the Republicans call for a West-Nordic community with Greenland and Iceland.

For the less vocal pro-separatist Conservative Party, however, a romantic interpretation of the Faroese identity is clearly part of the reason why the Faroe Islands should become independent from Denmark:

To be Faroese relates to the language and the culture. And even if we do not always acknowledge it, our origins as a whaling people impact our way of being today. We are a modernized society, but we also have root[s] in the whaling society, and there is a kind of whaling blood in us. This makes us special.<sup>13</sup>

What unites the different separatist discourses is the more or less open criticism of Denmark and the notion of *Rigsfællesskabet* (the Realm). As Conservative Party leader Jørgen Niclasen explains: ‘The Community of the Realm has meant that many Faroese have adjusted mentally to the idea that they need a bigger one to be with; they need a big one to help them up there. The self-esteem is lower. Historically, this makes sense ... the Faroese people were subordinated.’<sup>14</sup>

This is put even more directly by Høgni Hoydal:

The notion of Realm ... is created to mask a colonial relationship. In other situations, in a community of equals like a marriage between a man and a woman, both are independent subjects. However, the Community of the Realm does not consist of equals. I was negotiating independence, and we were told that Denmark sees the realm as one. Denmark is a realm, and the people living in the Faroes and Greenland are only ‘somewhat different’ Danes. I don’t

think the ordinary Dane thinks this way, but this is how it works politically. Then this thinking is covered up with the notion of the 'Community of the Realm'.<sup>15</sup>

The postcolonial references in the Faroese independence discourse address what is seen as a problematic silencing of the imperial legacy in Danish politics.

## From Danish empire to European family

Faroese voices of independence must increasingly take the EU into account. This increased interest in the EU is partly a spill-over effect from the metropole. While the Faroe Islands are not part of the EU, 'Danish legislation is brought into compliance with EU requirements, and much Faroese legislation is copied or adapted from Denmark' (Sharman, 2013). Yet this indirect Europeanization is not all. In the independence debate, the EU is constituted both as a threat and as an avenue for an independent Faroese state.

On 25 January 1974, the Faroese *Løgtingið* unanimously declared that it wished to remain outside the EEC, partly to avoid becoming subject to the Common Fisheries Policy. This opposition was based on a widely shared anxiety that European trawlers would come and take the entire fishing stock. Moreover, many feared that the EEC would endanger Faroese autonomy and its road towards independence. Instead, the Faroe Islands and the EU concluded a bilateral agreement on fisheries in 1977. The first Free Trade Agreement between the Faroe Islands and the EC was reached in 1991 and it was later revised, enabling the Faroe Islands to export most of its fish products to the EU market.<sup>16</sup> Quantitative restrictions on some fishing stocks that are of vital importance for the Faroese industry remain.

In 2010, this led to a 'mackerel war', in which EU fishing states criticized the high quotas set unilaterally by the Faroe Islands and Iceland on the grounds that global warming is pushing more mackerel north into their waters. Led by France, Portugal, Spain and Ireland, the EU decided to impose sanctions on Iceland and the Faroe Islands for breaching quotas.<sup>17</sup> The mackerel war put Denmark in an awkward position, having to defend Faroese interests vis-à-vis the EU while at the same time being a loyal and law-abiding member state. The Danish government chose not to vote in the Council of Ministers on the imposition of sanctions, attempting to manoeuvre in the intersection between the postcolonial and late-sovereign games.<sup>18</sup> The decision not to take sides was controversial. The fisheries spokesperson for the Conservative Party in Denmark, MP Lene Espersen, found that support for Faroese 'overfishing' would damage Danish interests in the EU and the interests of Danish fishermen, who are often seen as promoting a sustainable approach (Torp and Larsen, 2012). Denmark generally seeks to project an image of itself as eco-friendly. Meanwhile, Faroese politicians felt Denmark should have done more to defend the Faroese position. The next section will show how this difficult handling of two progressive discourses – 'eco-friendly' and 'respect for the former colony' – play out in relation to another controversial area: pilot whaling.

While the Common Fisheries Policy has rendered full EU membership difficult to imagine, some voices now talk about how to develop a closer relationship to the EU. In 2005, the Faroese parliament unanimously decided that the Faroe Islands should apply for full EFTA membership. Before doing so, however, the Faroese government tasked a



special commission with clarifying the different possibilities of Faroese relations to the EU, including the conditions under which Faroese EU membership might take place.

The report, which was made public in May 2010, offers fascinating insight into the partial Europeanization of the independence struggle, i.e. how Faroese and Danish politics are affected by prospects of European integration. Written by a group of Faroese and Danish officials, the report took a long time to complete. It is influenced by the many political constraints that they were facing, having to write the report as 'objectively' as possible while respecting the many sensitivities on both sides of the North Atlantic.

The report carefully seeks to present every scenario in a neutral language and concentrates on the administrative, political and financial aspects of closer cooperation with the EU. It includes three annexes, which are extremely telling with regard to the complexities of intersecting postcolonial and European sovereignty games. Annex 1 is a Memorandum on mixed agreements (agreements including the EC and all or some of its member states, the subject matter of which falls partly within the competence of the EC and partly within the competence of the member states). Annex 2 is an opinion paper by the Faroese House of Industry, which basically concludes that Faroese industry does not see much need for closer relations with the EU at present. Annex 3 contains the views of the Faroese trade unions (SAMTAK).

Annex 4 offers analysis of what is – interestingly – termed 'other microstates and the EU' by the Faroese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Indeed, while articulating the Faroe Islands as a (potential) microstate, the comparative analysis also underscores the difficulties of an independent and direct relationship with the EU. The brief annex compares the current relationships of four microstates (Liechtenstein, Andorra, San Marino and Monaco) and concludes that there are good political and economic reasons why these microstates have chosen to remain outside the EU while cooperating closely with the Union: 'As with the Faroes, the micro states share concerns in areas such as the administrative costs associated with a possible EU membership' (Report to Faroese Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2010: 81).

The report sketches out four possibilities, given the current position of the Faroe Islands as an autonomous region within the Danish realm (p. 14):

### 1. Expanding the current framework of EU cooperation

This scenario does not require a stance on altering the constitutional position, it does not require any change with regard to the Common Fisheries Policy, and it may improve market access and access to programmes via bilateral agreements. The formal drawbacks of this solution include that under the Foreign Policy Powers Act, the Faroe Islands cannot conclude agreements with the EU in areas with so-called shared competences on the EU side (e.g. education). Moreover, as the report notes, this is a sensitive process due to political divisions in the Faroe Islands in this area.

### 2. The Faroes as part of Danish EU membership

This scenario would provide the Faroe Islands with market access and full-fledged participation in the internal market and the four freedoms. It would also provide the Faroe



Islands with funds, and the Faroe Islands would be able to take part in the Danish EU decision-making process. According to the report, the problems with this are substantial. Politically, it would be considered a step backwards for Faroese decision-making to be re-integrated with Danish bureaucracy and political processes. Constitutionally, the Faroese Parliamentary Act on Home Rule does not allow the transfer of legislative power to institutions other than the Faroese parliament (such as the EU). Substantially, the Faroe Islands would be subjected to the EU's fisheries policy, and EU membership might restrict traditional Faroese hunting (whales and birds) and sheep slaughtering.

### 3. Independent Faroese EU membership

Compared to scenario 2, this would – at least in principle – give the Faroe Islands direct influence in the EU decision-making process without having to go through the Danish foreign policy system. However, independent Faroese EU membership would require the Faroe Islands becoming a state. Apart from the political, economic and social challenges involved in acquiring and sustaining national sovereignty, it is even uncertain whether the EU would accept the membership of such a small nation.

### 4. Faroese EEA membership

This scenario is challenging, the report notes, because EEA membership requires the Faroe Islands to be an independent state, which is not possible under the current Danish Constitution. The benefits of this model are that the Faroe Islands are not subjected to the EU fisheries policy and may easily negotiate opt-outs, yet still enjoy total access to the EU market and the four freedoms, as well as EU funding. As an EEA member, of course, a state only has indirect influence on EU decision-making processes.

As should be clear, however the Faroe Islands should choose to approach the EU, the Faroese government will necessarily have to rethink its relationship with Denmark (and the formal status of the Faroe Islands). As Høgni Hoydal puts it: 'We have moved into a number of complex constructions with the EU as for instance our air transport package, which will be difficult to get out of. This is so because these agreements are based on the fact that we are not an independent state.'<sup>19</sup>

Currently, the Faroese government is opting for solutions 1: closer cooperation with the EU, including cooperation regarding the four freedoms. For several years, however, solution 4 Faroese EEA or EFTA membership was very popular until it became clear for everyone that this would require an independent Faroese state.<sup>20</sup> According to Former Social Democratic Party leader and former Prime Minister Jóannes Eidesgaard, EFTA needed not be the final station of Faroese integration into Europe. Conservative Party leader Jørgen Niclasen agrees: EFTA will give the Faroe Islands better market access and improved cooperation in areas such as education, health and culture. In contrast, with full EU membership:

We would have to surrender everything that we do not want to give away. We would be forced to hand over the control of our resources, our autonomy and our democratic rights if we join the EU (Niclasen, 2010).

Notwithstanding this official line, there are internal disagreements in the government as regards the EU. On the one hand, the Unionist Party supports Faroese membership of the EU.<sup>21</sup> Johan Dahl of the Unionist Party compared EFTA with a solution whereby the Faroe Islands, as the poor man, will end up eating the crumbs that have fallen off the rich man's table. Instead of settling for closer cooperation, Faroese MP and strong EU proponent Edmund Joensen states:

EFTA is not sufficient, it does not cover our needs ... EFTA is a dying community and we do not belong there. The only friend the Faroe Islands have got in EFTA is Iceland, and Iceland already has one foot in the EU. Iceland wants *out* of the dying community that our minister of foreign affairs so strongly would like us to join. Everybody knows that the day that Icelandic EU membership is a reality, we in the Faroes will face huge problems.<sup>22</sup>

The prospect of Iceland joining the EU has led to fears of the Faroes being isolated outside the EU. In a pamphlet published in March 2013, MP Sjørður Skaale, from *Javnaðarflokkurin*, argues for an active EU policy inspired by Åland (see also Joenniemi, 2014). This scenario, which is far from backed by all members of the party, would involve the Faroe Islands joining the EU with important exceptions, ensuring that the Faroese remain in control of the local fish stocks (e.g. cod), but not migrant fish stock (e.g. mackerel). If Iceland could receive such an attractive deal on fisheries with the EU, so could the Faroe Islands, the argument goes. Interestingly, this scenario is also intrinsically linked to finding a way out of the colonial past. As Skaale explains:

Personally, I think Denmark takes up too much space in the Faroes. Our entire horizon is one big *Dannebrog* [the Danish flag]. If we became members of the European family, we would need to relate to European and international issues, not just local Faroes. This would widen our horizon.<sup>23</sup>

The left-wing, pro-independence Republican Party supports the fourth option. The party wishes the Faroe Islands to become a member of both the EFTA and the EEA as an independent, Faroese state. The party sees the EU as a threat, however, not only to Faroese fishing but also to Faroese democracy and autonomy in a globalizing world. The main arguments against Faroese EU membership remain the same today as in the past: resistance against the Faroe Islands submitting to the Common Fisheries Policy, as well as the sensitive issue of Faroese independence from Denmark.

In short, the EU is a difficult topic for all parties. This is so because it is raised as part of a debate about the relationship to Denmark, which has not yet been resolved. In this way, the EU debate is embedded in an older debate on the future of the unity of the Danish realm and questions of postcolonialism and independence. This leads to interesting arguments, in which European integration is sometimes seen as a way out of postcolonial dependency on Denmark. Yet exactly because of the EU's special constitutional character as a moving target – a late-sovereign construction with overlapping authorities – and not a traditional international organization, the EU is also depicted as a threat in the Faroese debate. Further integration into the Union, it is argued, would merely replace one type of dependency with another. But this type of anti-EU argument only works for a romantic version of the Faroese independence

dream. For the parties that have adopted a pro-globalist discourse, this anti-European position is more difficult to defend.

## **Practicing sovereignty games: pilot whaling and postcolonial embarrassment<sup>24</sup>**

The meeting between Danish postcolonial and EU late-sovereign games is not only discursive, but also apparent in everyday encounters and bureaucracy. This section addresses sovereignty games in practice by examining how the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Faroese Foreign Ministry handle the complex entanglement of, on the one hand, their postcolonial relations and, on the other, their international and European obligations and audiences. As mentioned previously, pilot whaling is a central element in – at least the romantic version of – Faroese nationalism. It is also a controversial practice, however, condemned by the international community and in particular the European Parliament. As will be demonstrated, the Danish–Faroese debate on pilot whaling illustrates internationalization and the partial Europeanization of the Faroese independence struggles. Moreover, it complicates the Danish and Faroese attempts at saving face, i.e. the image of the ‘self’ delineated in terms of approved social attributes (Goffman, 1967: 5). The whaling negotiations contribute to the postcolonial embarrassment experienced by Danish authorities.

The development of a global anti-whaling discourse fits into a meta-narrative about protecting the environment, initially domestically (e.g. from the mid-1960s in the US) and then worldwide. Epstein argues (2008: 104–108) that a key event was the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm. It consolidated a synecdoche whereby protection of the ‘environment’ was equated with protection of ‘endangered species’ in international forums, underpinned by a shift towards animal rights. Today, there is massive criticism of whaling and sealing practices around the world. Since 1984, pilot whale hunting has attracted organized protests by animal protection groups worldwide; in 1992, three of these groups, the Environmental Investigation Agency, the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and the World Society for the Protection of Animals, formed the Pilot Whale Campaign and started targeting importers and retailers of Faroese products in Britain (and later in Germany) in attempts to stop the import of Faroese products. The economic impact of these boycotts has been negligible thus far. Politically, however, the effects have been massive. The campaign portrays the pilot whale hunt as a cruel sport and the largest whale massacre in the world. According to Paul Watson, founder and leader of Sea Shepherd, who has visited the Faroe Islands several times to protest against the whaling, the hunters ‘literally saw through the animal’s spine to kill them. People tend to drink a lot and it’s a big party akin to the Roman gladiator games’ (Environmental News Network, 2000).

Why does the Danish government not outlaw pilot whale hunting? Why does Denmark defend the Faroe Islands in the EU? Denmark generally sports a green and animal-friendly profile internationally, and it has been heavily criticized over the years for not stopping the whale hunt. Many emails are sent monthly to the PM’s office from affected individuals, and numerous animal rights, conservation and environmental groups have condemned the hunt as cruel and unnecessary.

The EU has repeatedly criticized whaling, and the European Parliament has a strong focus on animal welfare issues. In May 2008, the European Commission asked environment ministers to speak up for the whales in response to the resumption of illegal Icelandic whaling. At the time, the Commission called on Iceland, which remains outside the EU, to prove that it is not engaged in commercial whaling. Since 2006, when Iceland resumed its arguably illegal whaling activities (illegal under international law and the IWC), it has claimed that the killing is only for scientific purposes. The European Commission dismisses this as a legitimate whaling activity, and Denmark alone supports the Icelandic position. Consequently, Denmark announced in mid-May 2008 that it would invoke a rarely used measure, 'Declaration 25', an annex to the Maastricht Treaty. The declaration refers to member states that have territories outside the EU – as is the case with the Faroe Islands and Greenland – and will allow Denmark to avoid being bound by the common position on whaling.

The recent discovery of health problems related to the consumption of whale meat has also been picked up by bloggers and activists. In 2008, the Faroese Department of Public and Occupational Health found that the amount of mercury and PCBs present in pilot whale meat and blubber was dangerous for human consumption (Weihe and Joensen, 2012). While many Faroese abstain from eating pilot whales, the average Faroese still consumes 6 kg of whale meat per year.

In one private blogger's interpretation, this only adds to the argument against whaling: 'Ironically, this practice, called *grindadráp*, is diminishing the population of 5,000 [*sic*] islanders. Many of them get sick and die from high mercury levels in the whales. Mentally retarded children are reportedly being born at alarmingly high rates.'<sup>25</sup> In this way, the Faroese are constituted as doubly barbaric – both because they engage in these 'terrifying' hunts, using old Viking techniques, and because they ignore the inherent health risks and give birth to mentally disabled children.

While Denmark receives much criticism internationally and the Faroese whaling practices are hardly boosting Denmark's image, the Danish government nonetheless has not sought to outlaw whale hunting. In fact, shifting Danish governments, and with them the Danish Foreign Ministry, have defended Faroese whaling practices. In 2009, Denmark wrote a letter of defence that was put on the websites of all Danish embassies, explaining that 'Faroese authorities take the animal welfare aspects of the hunt seriously':

The pilot whale hunt in the Faroes is, by its very nature, a dramatic and bloody sight. Entire schools of whales are killed on the shore and in the shallows of bays with knives, which are used to sever the major blood supply to the brain. This is the most efficient and humane means of killing these animals under the circumstances, but it naturally results in a lot of blood in the water. It is also understandable that there have been many strong reactions to media reports and pictures of the hunt in other countries, especially in urban communities, where most people have never actually been witness to the slaughtering processes from which their own meat derives.<sup>26</sup>

The Faroe Islands has an interesting position in relation to international law due to the Home Rule arrangement. As it is not an EU member, it is not subject to the European legislation prohibiting pilot whale hunting. Moreover, the Faroese whale hunt is not subject to international control, as it targets small species of whales (mainly pilot whales and

some dolphin species) that the International Whaling Commission (IWC) does not currently manage. There are therefore no legal mechanisms currently available to the outside world to prevent the hunt.

As indicated previously, EU membership would mean that the Faroese would have to give up whaling, bird hunting and sheep slaughtering due to EU regulations. This is an important argument against EU membership. The Faroese government and an overwhelming percentage of the Faroese population believe that the pilot whale hunt should be preserved as an institution of traditional Faroese culture. Criticism of the hunt by foreigners and the European Parliament, they maintain, shows disrespect for the Faroese people and amounts to a form of meddling in internal affairs. Apart from the legal trouble involved, however, this section suggests that Denmark's defence of the Faroese practices of pilot whaling has to do with the everyday management of Danish imperial legacy through postcolonial embarrassment (cf. Kristensen, 2004).

As a participant observer, I attended one of the semi-annual, high-level meetings between Faroese and Danish civil servants on all foreign affairs matters relating to the Faroe Islands. The meeting took place on 11 February 2011. These meetings reveal the complex negotiation of Faroese and Danish subject positions in face-to-face interactions.

Instead of an ordinary meeting room, the meeting takes place in the 'Executive Dining Room', the ceremonial meeting room of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Copenhagen. The issue is the pilot whale hunt. We are almost two-thirds down the long agenda. Four hours have already passed, and we have reached dessert. The two main figures in the meeting, the Directors of the Faroese and Danish Foreign Ministries, are seated in front of one another around an oval dining table. The Faroese and Danish delegations are shouldering their respective leaders. Everything is prepared down to the last detail. Rituals serve to ensure the smooth running of the meeting despite disagreements.

The representative from the Danish Prime Minister's Office sits in a corner. She is present because general questions about the Home Rule agreements are the responsibility of the PM's Office. The PM's representative begins by asking whether, in light of the overwhelming interest that the pilot hunt has received from international media and animal rights groups, the Faroese government would 'consider perhaps slightly revisiting some of the practices regarding the whale hunt?'. The question leaves the room silent.

The Director of the Faroese Foreign Ministry says: 'We follow international regulations on pilot whale hunting, but we will not change because Greenpeace tells us to.' He explains that handling the animal rights organization Sea Shepherd and aggressive journalists is a matter for the police. The Faroese Director continues: 'Of course, it is annoying with all the foreign journalists and activists that only come to the islands to take pictures of the bloody whale hunt.' Yet the Faroese are not going to change their practices.

Further discussion of the matter is clearly unwelcome. Nevertheless, the Director of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs picks up the issue. He says he has read – but of course the Faroese Foreign Minister must correct him if he is wrong – that eating pilot whale is bad for your health.

Again, there is silence. The Faroese negotiator looks up and smiles. 'Yes, that is true. We have found that there is too much mercury in the pilot whale.' The chief negotiator from the Faroese delegation pointedly looks straight into the eyes of the Director of the Danish Foreign Ministry and explains, 'I have eaten a lot of pilot whale in my life'.

Silence. And then, suddenly, the Faroese delegation bursts into laughter. This is a sign of relief. The tension has been resolved. The Danish negotiator also begins to laugh. Tongue in cheek, he says, 'ah yes, well – that explains something'. Discussion breaks out between the eight members of the Faroese delegation (some speaking Danish, some turning to Faroese). Who eats most pilot whale? That must be Arnfinn, because he comes from that bygd (a small Faroese village) which is renowned for pilot whale hunting. 'He's also a bit nuts.' Arnfinn laughs. The issue is no longer about diplomatically handling the international and European criticism of the Faroese pilot whale hunt, or whether Denmark, as the superior authority and responsible for Faroese foreign relations, has the right to question local whaling practices. Through this negotiation of the saving of face, Danish requests for changes to the pilot hunting practice have been rejected, at least at this meeting. Laughter has replaced the request from the former Danish colonizer to change whaling practices in order for the Danish state (and its dependencies) to safeguard its green and bio-friendly image.

The representative from the PM's office tries one last time. She repeats that the Prime Minister receives many emails and requests every single day about this issue. However, the atmosphere has changed and the meeting continues to other matters. The question of Denmark's international image has been derailed by an effective instrumentalization of postcolonial embarrassment, i.e. the embarrassing situation wherein Danish negotiators lose face because the postcolonial relationship is openly articulated.

The Danish government discourse is ambiguous. Pushed by the EU and international criticism, the Danish government (along with parts of the Faroese tourist industry) wants to regulate, circumscribe and civilize the whale hunt. However, the unity of the Danish realm is crucial. For Denmark to outright criticize pilot whaling would amount to rejecting Faroese self-rule. By defending the Faroese against the rest of the world, however, Denmark is precisely assuming its position as the responsible party; as a maternalistic colonial power acting on behalf of an adolescent colony that is unable to stand up for itself. So the circle is squared. The double move of defending a particular Faroese subjectivity at the same time constitutes the Faroe Islands as inferior and requiring assistance, as well as constituting the Faroe Islands as a single subject. This everyday intersection between the postcolonial sovereignty game and Europe demonstrates the complexities of the Faroese–Danish relationship. Internationalization and Europeanization contribute to bring the postimperial character of this relation into the spotlight.

## Conclusion

The EU plays an important role in postcolonial configurations and affects how former European colonies articulate sovereignty claims. This article has argued that it is increasingly difficult to understand the connection between the Faroe Islands and Denmark without taking the rest of the world, and Europe in particular, into account. This is striking, given that the Faroe Islands is not an EU member and may never become so.



Examining the political debates and diplomatic strategies surrounding the stalled negotiation of Faroese independence towards the end of the 1990s, the article has focused on the complex meeting between late-sovereign and postcolonial sovereignty games. Danish collective identity discourses are structured around the idea of a perfect fit between state, nation and people. This implies a collective amnesia when it comes to its imperial past. This makes Faroese arguments about a more autonomy within a Danish federation deeply disturbing. The Faroese national movement was first shaped by a romantic form of nationalism inspired by Danish identity-making in the 1880s. For Faroese separatists, Iceland remains the crucial point of reference and model for an independent Faroe Islands. However, the Faroe Islands increasingly plays on various international organizations such as the UN (and the principle of self-determination) to gain more independent subjectivity. After the Faroe Islands was turned down by the state-centric UN, the EU has become a reference in challenges to the postcolonial relationship with Denmark.

Europeanization both enables and excludes alternative political futures for the Faroe Islands and the Danish realm. For instance, the EU constrains Faroese fishing activities and criticizes pilot whaling. More fundamentally, the EU is appealing, but also controversial, because it always involves the question of the future relationship with Denmark. From the perspective of metropolitan Denmark, the Europeanization of the postcolonial relationship is also challenging. When the EU criticizes whaling, Danish officials on the one hand try to circumvent and civilize the hunting while on the other they defend Faroese hunting practices, thereby constituting themselves as a maternalistic colonial power acting on behalf of an adolescent colony that is unable to stand up for itself.

Many Faroese view the EU as a threat against relatively recently won authority and the process towards increased self-rule. According to pro-globalist separatists, a worst-case scenario would be for EU membership to lock the independence process, rendering it impossible for the Faroe Islands to break free of the union with Denmark, should this be the wish of the Faroese people (Hoff, 2012). Others, including Faroese supporters of the union with Denmark, envision more flexible futures whereby the EU becomes just another layer in a late-sovereign or multi-level system of authority that characterizes the Home Rule arrangement. While the EU may seem to offer a playing ground for separatist movements (Keating, 2004; Østergaard, 2000), it is only able to welcome sovereign states as its members. Moreover, from the perspective of globalist separatism, the EU appears to constrain the exercise of independent subjectivity in the world.

More generally, the Faroe Islands offers a striking example of how the meeting between postcolonial and late sovereignty games may result in a rather traditional sovereignty logic. While the Faroe Islands may be seeking to play a late-sovereign game by cooperating more closely with the EU, it is also operating within a postcolonial logic. Any discussion of the relationship with the EU necessarily involves addressing the relationship with the metropole of Denmark – and thus the unity of the Danish realm. As the participant observation showed, discussions of how to handle pilot whaling or discussions regarding the rest of the world involve simultaneously accounting for how this will affect the constitutional system of Denmark. As long as the Faroe Islands remain part of the Danish postimperial structure, it is difficult to perform international subjectivity independent from Denmark.



The analysis points out the importance of studying the relationship between European integration and the disintegration of European empires. So far, the flexible Danish home rule system has allowed for more autonomy without really putting the unity of the Danish realm into question. On the one hand, the internationalization and Europeanization of this postcolonial sovereignty game supports this flexibility by opening up additional avenues for constructing the unity of the realm. On the other hand, it appears as though references to the late-sovereign EU somewhat paradoxically force its member states and their former colonies to think in rather traditional ways: in their formal engagement with the EU, the Faroe Islands either become a fully sovereign and independent state or remains subject to Danish authority. In both situations, however, European integration contributes to the short-circuiting of traditional conceptions of Danish sovereignty. The real novelty is not the increased autonomy from Denmark but rather how the EU helps challenge the unity of the Danish realm and hence the myth of a homogenous Danish nation-state.

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### Notes

1. The Mission of the Faroe Islands to the European Union is located on Rue d'Arlon 69–71 in Brussels, together with the Danish Permanent Representation, the Royal Danish Embassy, and the Representation of Greenland to the European Union.
2. In 1808, the life of Nólsoyar-Páll came to a premature end. He was travelling by ship from England to the Faroe Islands with a cargo of grain but never arrived. The ship was probably lost in the autumn storms, but rumour had it that the Danish officials had paid a pirate to sink Nólsoyar-Páll's ship.
3. See also [http://www.hagstova.fo/portal/page/portal/HAGSTOVAN/Statistics\\_%20Faroe\\_Islands/Themes/POLITICS](http://www.hagstova.fo/portal/page/portal/HAGSTOVAN/Statistics_%20Faroe_Islands/Themes/POLITICS), accessed 25 September 2011.
4. Iceland's 'big brother' role is still apparent today. For instance, the Icelandic government advises the Faroese government in matters regarding independence from Denmark and the prospect of closer association with the EU (Broch and Nielsen, 2000: 69; see also Bergmann, 2014).
5. Several international scholars participated. Barry Bartmann submitted an optimistic review of 'the Microstate Experience' (Bartmann, 2000).
6. General Assembly Resolution 1541, Principle VII(b).
7. According to the Home Rule Act, in security, military, healthcare, social services, aviation and maritime administration, 'special provisions and arrangements' should be made in administrative cooperation between Denmark and the Faroe Islands.
8. Interviews, Head of Office and Head of Section, Western Europe, European External Action Service (EEAS), Brussels, 23 March 2011.

9. *Lagmandens talepunkter på mødet med den danske regering 26. oktober 2000*, <http://www.fullveldi.fo/FullveldiVisTidindi.asp?Id=354>, accessed 5 October 2003.
10. Anfinn Kallsberg, Helena Dam á Neystabø and Høgni Hoydal, *Fra hjemmestyreløst til forbundstraktat*, 2000, <http://www.fullveldi.fo/FullveldiVisTidindi.asp?Id=96>.
11. 'Sovereignty is Democracy', <http://www.fullveldi.fo/FullveldiVisTidindi.asp?Id=325>, accessed 20 October 2003.
12. Interview with Høgni Hoydal, Leader of the Republican Party, January 2011.
13. Interview with Jørgen Niclasen, Leader of the Conservative Party, January 2011.
14. Interview with Jørgen Niclasen, Leader of the Conservative Party, January 2011.
15. Interview with Høgni Hoydal, Leader of the Republican Party, January 2011.
16. This agreement later saw changes with regard to e.g. market access and veterinary issues, <http://www.tjodveldi.fo/forsida/tidindi.aspx?PID=36&NewsID=924>><http://www.tjodveldi.fo/forsida/tidindi.aspx?PID=36&NewsID=924>, accessed 27 September 2011.
17. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/16/us-eu-iceland-mackerel-idUSTRE81F1NU20120216>
18. <http://www.bt.dk/politik/danmark-fanget-mellem-eu-og-faeroeerne-i-makrelkrig>, accessed 13 March 2012.
19. Interview with Høgni Hoydal, Leader of the Republican Party, January 2011.
20. Interview with Jóannes Eidesgaard, former Leader of Social Democratic Party, January 2011.
21. The party has not yet presented a strategy, but is a proponent of possibilities 1 and 2.
22. Interview with Edmund Joensen, MP from the Social Democratic Party, January 2011.
23. Claus Dørup, 14 March 2013, 'Færøsk-S-oplæg om tættere tilknytning til EU', <http://fagpressen.eu/faerosk-s-oplaeg-om-taettere-tilknytning-til-eu/>
24. Part of the research for this section has also been published as R Adler-Nissen (2012) 'Diplomacy as Impression Management: Strategic Face-Work and Postcolonial Embarrassment' CIPSS Working Paper, no. 38, Montreal: Center for International Peace and Security Studies.
25. See blog: The Cult of Death Fish <http://cultofthedeathfish.blogspot.com/2010/05/horrible-whale-and-dolphin-massacre.html>. Actually, there are not 5000 but almost 50,000 inhabitants of the Faroe Islands.
26. See 'Whales and Whaling in the Faroe Islands', <http://www.mfa.fo/Default.aspx?ID=9770>, Accessed 27 September 2011.

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